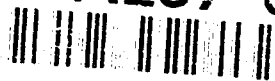


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A RAND NOTE

New Caledonia: The Fragile Peace

George K. Tanham

June 1990

RAND

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This Note examines the current political situation in New Caledonia and the prospects for independence for this French Territory in the Southwest Pacific. The analysis is based primarily on the author's two visits to the territory in 1989 when he spoke with leaders of both the indigenous and European communities, local officials, and private citizens. Increasing disruption and violence of the independence movement was ended by the Matignon Accord of 1988, which promised a referendum on independence in 1998 and divided the territory into three autonomous provinces, two of which are controlled by the indigenous population. The French government is providing generous assistance for political, social, and economic development. Whether such assistance and limited self-government will frustrate the drive for independence is uncertain. Although the current situation is relatively stable and peaceful, conditions remain volatile.

## A RAND NOTE

**N-3040-USDP**

## New Caledonia: The Fragile Peace

**George K. Tanham**

## June 1990

**Prepared for the  
Under Secretary of Defense for Policy**

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## PREFACE

This Note examines the current political situation in New Caledonia and the prospects for the future independence of this French overseas territory in the Southwest Pacific. The examination is based primarily on the author's two visits to the territory, March 13-24 and July 17-28, 1989, during which he spoke with top leaders from both the indigenous and European communities, local officials, and private citizens. A list of informants appears at the end of the text.

The research for the Note was sponsored by the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy and conducted under the auspices of the RAND National Defense Research Institute, a federally funded research and development center supported by the Office of the Secretary of Defense. The Note is part of a larger study on "Security Trends in the South Pacific," performed under RAND's International Security and Defense Policy Program.<sup>1</sup> It should be of interest to relevant offices in the Departments of Defense and State, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the National Security Council.

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<sup>1</sup>Other studies by the same author include George K. Tanham and Eleanor S. Wainstein, *Security Trends in the South Pacific: Vanuatu and Fiji*, N-2728-USDP, November 1988; George K. Tanham, *The Kingdom of Tonga*, N-2779-USDP, November 1988; and George K. Tanham and Eleanor S. Wainstein, *Papua New Guinea Today*, June 1990.

## SUMMARY

The Matignon Accord of June 1988 halted the mounting violence in New Caledonia stemming from the activities of the independence movement in late 1987 and early 1988. The Accord was signed in Paris by representatives of the indigenous New Caledonians (Melanesians calling themselves Kanaks), the New Caledonians of French origin (called Caldoches), and the French government. It provided for a referendum on national independence, to be held in ten years (1998), and divided the territory into three autonomous provinces. As a result of the provincial elections of June 1989, the Kanaks now control two provinces and the Caldoches, one. A territorial government retains the functions not turned over to the provinces. In addition, the French government is generously funding Kanak political, social, and economic development.

The Kanaks demanded, and continue to demand, independence; the French and Caldoches want New Caledonia to remain a part of France. The latter hope that provincial self-government and the large amount of money that France is pouring in will persuade enough Kanaks and other ethnic groups to vote with the Caldoches to defeat the independence movement in the referendum. The Kanaks, for their part, hope to gain enough political experience in the provincial governments and to achieve sufficient capability in the business sector to persuade the doubtful Kanaks and others that independence is the best course and that they are capable of running an independent nation.

Thus, although the Matignon Accord has brought peace and bought time, the confrontational situation continues, with each side determined to win in 1998. On the one hand, the experiment has made a reasonably good start; on the other hand, many old problems remain and others are developing. Given the emotional factors involved, no one can predict the outcome. However, along with the fragile peace, the Accord has given the territory a means of solving its political problems (the referendum) and, perhaps more important, an atmosphere of greater tolerance and the opportunity to investigate other peaceful solutions.

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## ACRONYMS OF NEW CALEDONIAN POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS

FC	Front Caledonien
FLNKS	Front de Liberation Nationale Kanake Socialiste
FN	Front National
FULK	Front Uni de Liberation Kanake
LCR	Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire
LKS	Liberation Kanake Socialiste
PALIKA	Parti de Liberation Kanake
RPCR	Rassemblement pour la Caledonie dans la Republique
UC	Union Caledonienne
UPM	Union Progressiste Melanesienne
USTKE	Union Syndical des Travailleurs Kanaks et Exploites (a trade union, but part of the FLNKS until August 1989)

## I. INTRODUCTION

The group of volcanic islands known as the French overseas Territory of New Caledonia and Dependencies lies in the Southwest Pacific, approximately 1000 miles east of Queensland, Australia (see Fig. 1). Covering an area of 7000 square miles, the territory includes one large island, New Caledonia, also known as the *grande terre*, the four Loyalty Islands—Mare, Lifou, Ouvea, and Tiga—off the east coast, the Isle of Pines, and numerous small islands (see Fig. 2).

The importance of the Southwest Pacific island nations to the United States rests mainly on their strategic position astride the trade routes between the United States and both Asia and Australia. For Australia, the Southwest Pacific is obviously a region of primary strategic importance. France, too, has major interests in the area.

Although most concerned about Papua New Guinea (PNG) among the Southwest Pacific islands, Australia nevertheless counts the somewhat more distant New Caledonia as part of its security interests. Australia would not want an unfriendly nation to dominate or control the territory. Libyan activities in New Caledonia and Vanuatu have raised western, and especially Australian, concerns; to date, however, Libya's interests remain extremely limited.

The French regard their nuclear testing in the French Polynesian area of the Southwest Pacific, though unpopular with the indigenous populations, as vital for France's defenses in Europe and a symbol of its world status. New Caledonia's extremely rich nickel and possibly other mineral resources and the sizable French population make the territory a key link in France's global strategy.

The United States supports the policies and activities of Prime Minister Michel Rocard's socialist government in dealing with France's Southwest Pacific dependencies, as the islanders find these policies and activities more acceptable than those of earlier, more conservative French governments. The resulting easing of tensions has decreased the possibility of U.S.-French friction in the region—friction that might adversely affect U.S.-French relations in Europe.

Although Captain James Cook, the English explorer, discovered and named New Caledonia in 1774, France annexed it in 1853 to bolster French naval and commercial interests in the area. The French also used the island as a penal colony from 1864 until 1894. Over the years, French migrated to New Caledonia, and their descendants now

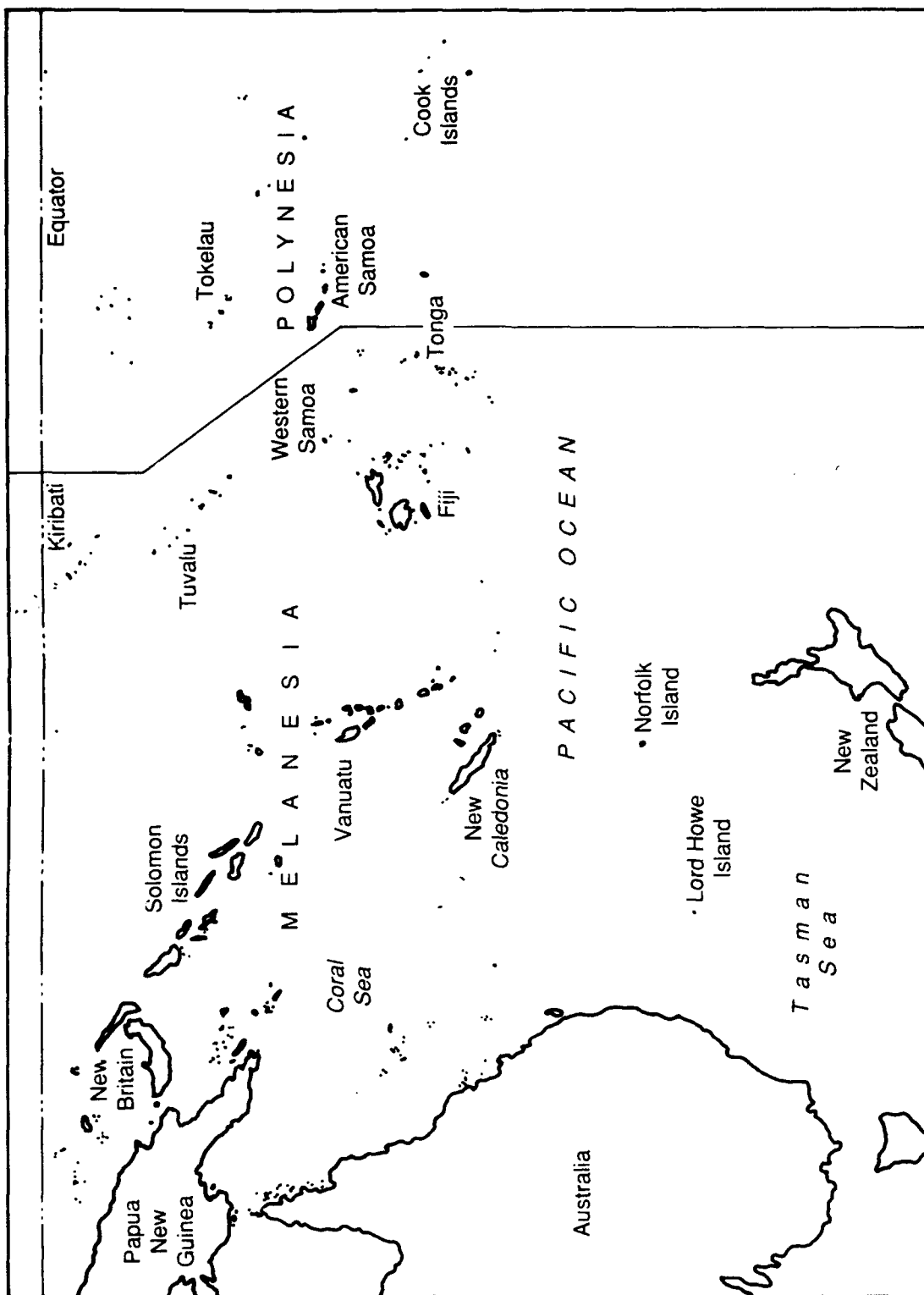


Fig. 1—South Pacific Islands

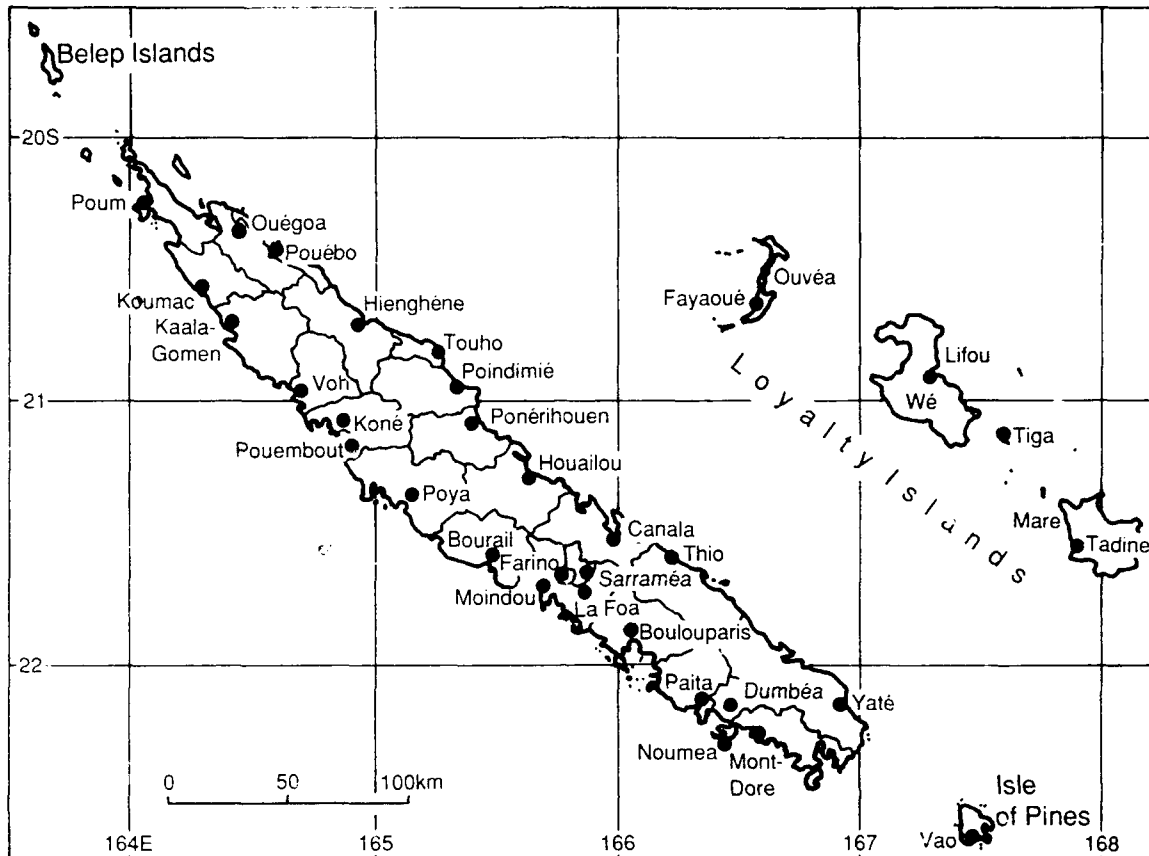


Fig. 2—New Caledonia

constitute a large portion of the population. A French overseas territory since 1946, New Caledonia currently sends two deputies and one senator to the French Parliament.

New Caledonia contains some of the richest nickel reserves in the world. The islanders raise cattle and coffee (22 percent of the land is pasture, 6 percent is arable), but nickel is the only major export. Thanks to the pleasant, subtropical climate, tourism is growing modestly, especially from Japan.

The territory has a population of about 165,000.<sup>1</sup> The indigenous people, Melanesians calling themselves Kanaks, number over 73,000, or approximately 44 percent of the total population. Thus, they are the largest single group, but nevertheless a minority in the islands. Those of French origin, called Caldoches or Europeans, constitute another

<sup>1</sup>Population figures are from the provisional results of the 1989 census.

55,000, or about 33 percent. About 14,000 Wallisians, or 8 percent, came from the French Territory of the Wallis and Futuna Islands, northeast of Fiji; over 5000 Tahitians have migrated over the years from French Polynesia. In addition, the French at various times brought in Indonesians and Vietnamese as laborers—the former now number about 5000; the latter, about 3000.

Nearly half of the territory's population lives in Noumea, the modern, comfortable capital, and its suburbs. Noumea itself, by far the largest city in the islands, with a population of 55,000, is dominated by non-Kanaks: 79 percent of the Europeans in New Caledonia, 76 percent of the Indonesians, 90 percent of the Polynesians, 94 percent of the Vietnamese, and 89 percent of the Wallisians, but only 20 percent of the Kanaks, live in Noumea.

The west coast of the main island, with its broad and relatively rich coastal plain, has a significant European population centered in several small towns; the rugged east coast, where the mountains come right down to the sea, is inhabited almost entirely by Kanaks, whom the French over the years pushed into this less fertile area. Land has been perhaps the most critical issue in Kanak-French relations, leading to large-scale revolts in 1878 and 1917, as well as to recent violence.<sup>2</sup>

In response to mounting violence between the French and the Melanesian indigenous population stemming from the activities of the independence movement, the French government in June 1988 signed an agreement—the Matignon Accord—with the leaders of the main Caldoche and Kanak groups. The agreement calls for a referendum on national independence, to be held in 1998. It also divided New Caledonia into three autonomous provinces—South, North, and Loyalty Islands—each with its own legislature. As a result of the elections in June 1989, the Kanaks control two of the provincial assemblies and the Caldoches, one. A territorial government retains the functions not turned over to the provinces. The changes went into effect on July 14, 1989.

This Note examines the situation in New Caledonia as of mid-1989 and the prospects for the uneasy peace established by the Matignon Accord. Subsequent sections review the development of the independence movement, the basis of the indigenous population's dispute with France, the difficulties of implementing the Matignon Accord, the problems of the youth, and indigenous customs that hinder progress. Finally, Sec. VII presents my conclusions regarding the future of the territory.

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<sup>2</sup>Land ownership is discussed below, in Sec. VI, "Customs, Power, and National Goals."

## II. THE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT AND THE MATIGNON ACCORD

The New Caledonian independence movement, which began to develop in the early 1970s, gained momentum during the mid-1980s. Many, or most, of the indigenous Kanak minority want independence, which the Melanesian peoples of Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu have already achieved. The determined Caldoches, however, also consider New Caledonia their home—some are fifth-generation inhabitants—and want it to remain part of France. They also want to continue to dominate the political and economic affairs of the territory. The 56 percent of the total population that is not Kanak has tended to support the French-Caldoche position.

Clashes between the Kanaks and the Caldoches became particularly serious in 1984 and 1985. Geographic and social segregation between the two groups led to the emergence of two distinct societies: one, primarily black, rural, and poor; the other, largely white, urban, and rich.<sup>1</sup> In late 1987, the Front de Liberation Nationale Kanake Socialiste (FLNKS),<sup>2</sup> a loose coalition of most of the *independantiste* parties, took a firm stand against the earlier Pons autonomy plan.<sup>3</sup>

Several months later, the FLNKS sought to disrupt the regional elections scheduled for April 24, 1988, so as to force the French government to begin talks with the Kanaks on independence. Kanak separatists on Ouvéa seized 27 French police officers. Four gendarmes were killed in the action; the remaining 23 were held hostage in a cave. Negotiations to free the hostages failed, and on May 5 French commandos assaulted the cave. Nineteen Kanaks and two French soldiers were killed and eight militants captured.

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<sup>1</sup>There are also some poor Caldoches in the rural areas.

<sup>2</sup>The FLNKS includes the following parties: The Union Calédonienne (UC), the oldest and largest Kanak party, led by Jean-Marie Tjibaou until his death in May 1989 and, since then, by François Burck; the growing Parti de Liberation Kanake (PALIKA), which has a Marxist tinge and is headed by Paul Neaoutyne, the mayor of Poindimié; the somewhat radical Front Uni de Liberation Kanake (FULK), led by Yann Céline Uregei, who carries on a flirtation with Libya; and the socialist Union Progressiste Mélanésienne (UPM), under Edmond Nekiriai, who is also mayor of Poya. The Union Syndical des Travailleurs Kanaks et Exploités (USTKE), led by Louis Kotra Uregei, a cousin of Y. C. Uregei, withdrew from the FLNKS on July 27, 1989. The FLNKS also does not include the more centrist Liberation Kanake Socialiste (LKS), led by Nidoish Naisseline. The Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République (RPCR) is the largest party in the territory and includes most of the Caldoches, 20 to 30 percent of the Kanaks, and many of the other ethnic groups. The far right includes three main parties, all small: the Front National (FN), the Front Calédonien (FC), and the Entente. A number of local parties add to the numbers at elections.

<sup>3</sup>Bernard Pons was then minister of Overseas Departments and Territories.

Evidence that three Kanaks had been executed after the attack and that Kanak prisoners had been tortured exacerbated the racial hostility. By July, many Caldoches had been driven from their homes and some of the main island's east coast was dangerous for whites. The hostage episode showed how close the territory was to civil war and also how brutal and deadly the situation could become. It seems to have deeply concerned leaders of both sides.

In June 1988, Michel Rocard, the new socialist prime minister of France, invited Jean-Marie Tjibaou, the venerated head of the FLNKS, and Jacques Lafleur, leader of the conservative, anti-independence Rassemblement pour la Caledonie dans la Republique (RPCR), to France to discuss the situation. The two Caledonian leaders, both of whom eschewed violence, went to Paris, where on June 26, 1988, they signed the Matignon Accord with the French government. The Accord was approved that November in a referendum held throughout France. The agreement represented a compromise that both Lafleur and Tjibaou accepted so as to bring peace to New Caledonia.<sup>4</sup>

By March 1989, the time of my first visit, peace had indeed been restored in New Caledonia, in marked contrast to the bitterness and violence of a year earlier.<sup>5</sup> One could drive anywhere on the *grande terre* without fear, and Noumea was tranquil. People from all the communities expressed cautious optimism about the future, at the same time stressing the delicacy of the situation. In July, on my second visit, the territory, except perhaps for Ouvea, remained calm and peaceful. The people seemed more positive and more optimistic regarding the future, and I heard less talk of the delicacy of the situation, at least among the territory's leaders.

Both the municipal elections in March 1989 and the provincial elections in June had proceeded peacefully and almost without incident. The newly elected provincial assemblies had chosen the provincial capitals and the senior officials. And, as promised, the French government is pouring in money for the advancement of the Kanaks. Even the tragic and untimely assassination of Jean-Marie Tjibaou in May 1989, though it shocked the entire territory, did not lead to violence. It has, however, left the Kanak independence movement leaderless, with no candidates of equal stature visible.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Follow-on discussions led to the Oudinot agreement in August, but the entire process is usually called the Matignon Accord.

<sup>5</sup>In addition to Noumea and environs, I visited the northern part of the main island and both the east and west coasts; I did not get to the Loyalty Islands.

<sup>6</sup>Tjibaou's assassination is discussed below in Sec. III, "Kanak Discord."

The Matignon Accord, seen as a miracle by many, is largely responsible for the present peaceful situation. It provides for a referendum on independence to be held ten years after the signing (i.e., in 1998), with voting restricted to those already enrolled or potentially eligible in 1988.<sup>7</sup> It also calls for periodic progress reviews and a formal report in 1992 on how the agreement is being implemented. Ten years was seen as appropriate time for implementing the new provincial governments and redressing perceived imbalances in the economic and social spheres.

France is greatly increasing funds for Kanak education, training, and development and has set the long-range goal of improving the welfare of the Kanaks, adapting business laws to Kanak customs, creating greater governmental and private sector opportunities for the Kanaks, and modernizing the rural infrastructures so as to facilitate access to remote areas.

The Accord had received a mixed reception, however, when the negotiators returned to New Caledonia in summer 1988. The FLNKS conference in Thio strongly criticized Tjibaou for signing the Accord and failed to reach agreement on accepting it. A second conference, convened in Ouvea in August, revealed continuing differences. The main objections were that Tjibaou had given away too much and that the agreement delayed independence too long. In the end, however, most Kanak leaders decided to support Tjibaou and in the November 1988 referendum voted for the Accord in a show of *independantiste* unity.

Lafleur, though gaining the quick support of the RPCR congress for the Accord, was roundly criticized and called a traitor by Caldoche conservatives, especially the Front National. In the November 1988 referendum, a majority in Noumea and in the largely Caldoche communes in the west voted against the Accord, and the National Front claimed victory. The negative vote, however, reflected dissatisfaction with more than the Accord alone: Some voted against the new French socialist government; some disliked Lafleur, and others said that he failed to campaign hard enough; and some strongly opposed the Accord's amnesty of the Kanak "terrorists." However, the Kanaks and others supported the Accord, and it was approved in the territory.

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<sup>7</sup>The very large European minority in New Caledonia has made independence a far more complicated issue than was the case in other Pacific islands. For example, the question of who should be eligible to vote on the independence issue—in other words, who are "the people"—has been a difficult and emotional issue, as the other groups in the territory outnumber the indigenous Kanaks. However, the Accord *seems* to have settled the issue, though some Kanaks believe that the problem remains.



The Matignon Accord, in fact, actually solved little, but brought peace, gained time, and provided a means for a peaceful solution. The Kanaks still insist on independence, while most Caldoches and a majority of the other groups want continued association with France. The French government hopes that if it spends money to educate and train Kanaks and thus to vastly speed up their development, many of them will be persuaded by the time of the 1998 referendum that remaining a part of France is the best course for the future. Somewhere between 20 and 30 percent of the Kanaks have usually voted against independence in the past, and opponents of independence hope to hold or increase this number during the next few years. The other ethnic groups tend to support the French.

Many, but by no means all, members of the FLNKS are prepared to accept development in place of independence, but only for the *immediate* future. Some Kanak leaders realize that the Kanaks are not yet prepared to rule the country, nor to run the economy; the recent experiences of Papua New Guinea, Fiji, and Vanuatu have made some of them more cautious. Furthermore, they see the value of all the money that the French government is pouring in to help them—funds not likely to be available if they become independent. But a number still hold out for immediate independence.

Overall, the Accord has had a positive and constructive effect on New Caledonia. This cardinal point should not be forgotten when we discuss the problems in the territory, a few of which, ironically, have been created or aggravated by certain features or implementation of the Accord.

In the efforts and programs begun under the Matignon Accord, the French government in Paris and as represented in New Caledonia by the high commissioner has tried to maintain an impartial and evenhanded position. The high commissioner told me that he had to be absolutely fair, that he could not even lean a little one way then the other way to balance it, as that would destroy his neutral position. The French government stance has had considerable success.

One Kanak leader who is quite critical of the way things are going in New Caledonia said, however, that he was afraid that Prime Minister Rocard was not getting accurate reports on the situation in the territory. This leader believed that the premier would have taken corrective action in support of some Kanak positions, had he known about them. Some Kanaks also thought that their views had failed to reach Minister of Overseas Departments and Territories Louis Le Pensec during his July 1989 visit, as he had such a busy schedule.<sup>8</sup> Other Kanaks said that the French government appeared to be neutral but in

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<sup>8</sup>Two party leaders (I could not find out which ones) did not attend a scheduled meeting with the minister.

fact was using the RPCR to get its views across. In this case, as in so many others reported here, there are opposite interpretations of policies and facts.

Both Tjibaou and Lafleur seem to have lived up to their word, accepting the Accord in good faith and dedicating themselves to making it work, though they sought opposite outcomes. Tjibaou genuinely wanted to avoid violence and to encourage the development of his people in every way. Lafleur has serious heart trouble and wants to conciliate and to avoid violence.

For better or for worse, the success of the Matignon Accord seemed to rest largely on these two men, one of whom is now dead. My repeated question in March as to what would happen or who would take over if one or the other leader died elicited only a shrugging of shoulders. Neither man seems to have groomed a successor, and there is no consensus on one. In the case of Jean-Marie Tjibaou, his deputy, Yeiwene Yeiwene, would have been the logical successor, had he not also been killed at the same time as Tjibaou.<sup>9</sup> Although there are a few candidates and a decision on a replacement for Tjibaou was to have been made by the end of the year, as of January 1990 a new leader has yet to be chosen. In any event, Tjibaou's death may have added to the support of the Matignon Accord, as people feel that Tjibaou wanted it to be carried out; his death was the price he paid for his support of the Accord, and in their view, this sacrifice could not be ignored.

On the Caldoche side, the RPCR seems to have somewhat consolidated its power. In the March communal elections, the conservative parties—the Front National and the Front Caledonien—did quite well, together getting perhaps one third of the Caldoche votes in Noumea. In the June provincial elections, however, the Front Caledonien lost all its seats and the Front National was reduced from seven to three seats. This is not to say that the hard-line right has disappeared—only that it seems to have lost some support. It is still a vocal minority that cannot be ignored.

Perhaps more worrisome in the long run for the RPCR is the development among the Wallisians of a desire to be more independent of the RPCR. In the June election, a new Wallisian party, the Oceanian Union, won two seats in the assembly. Its leader, Kalepo Mulera, died in mid-August, creating problems for the new party, but it seems likely to continue. While this development is not necessarily anti-French, even the formation of a party among the other ethnic groups is a matter of concern to the local opponents of independence, as members of the different ethnic groups might desert the anti-independence

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<sup>9</sup>See "The Assassination of Tjibaou" in Sec. III, below.

cause, which they have thus far supported. Their loss could certainly reduce significantly the chances of a a vote against independence in 1998. As an indication of Caldoche concern, Lafleur said in a radio broadcast that if the Wallisians kept this up, they should be sent back to Wallis Island.

### III. KANAK DISCORD

As well as bringing peace to the territory, the Matignon Accord has created discord among the Kanaks who want independence. One moderate minor party leader said even before Tjibaou's assassination that the movement had never been so divided. Tjibaou's death has created suspicion among Kanaks and removed the one leader capable of holding them together. In July, one resident metropolitan Frenchman, a close student of the Southwest Pacific, while generally more optimistic than he had been in March, said that the Kanak situation was becoming "unstable," especially because of the leadership problems.

#### POLITICAL RIVALRIES

The activists in favor of immediate independence—Uregei and his small Front Uni de Liberation Kanake (FULK) party and many of the young—have consistently rejected Matignon. This opposition appears to be poorly organized and probably small in numbers, but its members are active; they seem to be receiving at least some small support from abroad.<sup>1</sup>

A Kanak reported that the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire (LCR), a small French leftist (Trotskyist) party, was sending some members to live for a few months in New Caledonian villages—for example, Ouvea, Yate, and Poindimie—with the aim of inciting the people to revolt. The same Frenchman quoted above tended to agree, saying that the extremist ideas were coming not from communist countries but from France.

A few Kanak youths, mainly from FULK, attended the Thirteenth World Festival of Youths and Students, held in Pyonyang, North Korea, in July 1989. Reportedly, eight remained behind to attend a "training camp," where instruction may include terrorist tactics. Several sources, both Kanak and Caldoche, commented that North Korea seems to be becoming more involved, though no one could pinpoint its activities.

Uregei's connections with Libya also are still mentioned. Most believe he must be getting funds from somewhere, as he travels constantly. He was in New York in August when the UN "Committee of 24" met, even though the FLNKS's official representative,

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<sup>1</sup>One French schoolteacher in Bourail said that her young students brought radical literature to school and that she suspected 75 percent of them, and of course their families, of being strongly *independantiste*. She was not sure that the young girls understood all of the slogans, but believed that the ideas were coming from the parents, who in all probability did understand.

Rock Wamytan, was also there. These activist *indendantistes* cannot be dismissed: It does not take many of them to create serious incidents with far-reaching consequences.

Another source of disunity is the friction between the smaller parties and the Union Caledonienne (UC), the largest Kanak party. The municipal elections in March 1989 highlighted some of the rivalry. The several *indendantiste* parties often nominated candidates who competed against each other. The FLNKS, the overall federation, had its candidates, while the UC, the Parti de Liberation Kanake (PALIKA), the Union Progressiste Melanesienne (UPM), and the FULK—all members of FLNKS—each had its own candidate. In addition, there were local groupings and the Liberation Kanake Socialiste (LKS) on Mare, where the moderate LKS and the radical FULK ran together against the UC in the second round of the municipal voting.

One Kanak leader told me that in Ouvea, Yate, and Ponerihouen the UC and RPCR had voted together against the other *indendantiste* parties to elect the mayors. Fidele Ayawa (UC), who was elected mayor of Ponerihouen, was forced to resign in mid-April because of these charges.

After the provincial elections in June 1989, the PALIKA president, Paul Neaoutyne, withdrew his candidacy for the first vice presidency of the North province, allegedly as a result of UC pressure.<sup>2</sup> Until then he had urged his followers to vote with the UC, but now he no longer fully supports it. His withdrawal is particularly unfortunate, as many young Kanaks like his leadership of PALIKA and his obvious concern for the welfare of his people. The FLNKS needs active leaders like him. Some French officials concede that the UC may be a little heavy-handed at times because they have such a preponderance of power. Some UC members, seeing the problem, argue that the party must work more closely with the minor parties.

The French government's input of considerable new money for Kanak development, as promised, seems to be contributing in some ways to the anti-UC feeling. Some Kanaks believe, rightly or wrongly, that UC members are favored in the distribution of funds and in the selection of personnel for training in France and for the top positions in the government.

The high commissioner and other top French officials strongly denied any such favoritism, saying that they were trying to select from a wide spectrum of Kanaks. The UC, after all, represents about 75 percent of the *indendantiste* Kanaks and, therefore, should receive most of the jobs and moneys. Moreover, personal and clan rivalries often coincide

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<sup>2</sup>In the provincial elections, the FLNKS put forward a single list of candidates, but disunity surfaced again right after the elections.

with political differences. In such situations, jealousy and feelings of maltreatment abound, but the favoritism issue should concern the French government.

Some Kanaks, however, believe that the Caldoches are secretly encouraging these divisions. They cite the election of Francois Burck, who is only partially Kanak, to head the UC as one example of French intrigue.<sup>3</sup> Some Kanaks perceive the RPCR's relationship with the FLNKS as too close. In a sense, the largest Kanak party is seen by some as having been at least partially co-opted by the Caldoches through the new leadership and the RPCR-FLNKS close working relationship that has begun to develop under the Matignon Accord. As one Kanak put it, the UC is acting more and more like a French party.

This opposition to the UC, which existed before Tjibaou's untimely death, led in late 1988 to the formation of an informal group calling itself the Anti-neocolonialism Committee. It unites individuals rather than organizations, though members of various parties and organizations attend. Only a few meetings have been held and its exact status in July was unclear, partially at least because of Tjibaou's death. Some of those who attended have opposed the UC rather vocally, including Nidoish Naisseline, the LKS leader, who reportedly is "fed up" with politics and was in Australia in July.<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to determine the extent and depth of the anti-UC feeling, but it definitely exists and seems to be encouraged by some of the very efforts—development funds and training—which are intended to help the Kanaks.

#### THE ASSASSINATION OF TJIBAOU

The assassination of Tjibaou is perhaps the most extreme example of the divisions among the Kanaks. It robbed the Kanaks of their greatest leader and led to even greater differences and animosities. In addition, Tjibaou's capable, stalwart deputy, Yeiwene Yeiwene, was also killed. The story of the assassinations is still controversial, but one version is as follows:

The FLNKS opposition to the April 1988 elections led to considerable agitation in the territory. As a part of the opposition, and in an effort to attract French attention, Djoubelly Wea from Ouvea and Yeweine Yeweine (familiarily called YeYe) from Mare plotted with others to seize some gendarmes as hostages so as to exert more pressure on the French to

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<sup>3</sup>Burck, now a more patient *independantiste*, was once a hard-line fighter for independence and hardly a French puppet.

<sup>4</sup>He was in Australia mainly because his wife was in the hospital in Sydney, owing to pregnancy complications.

discuss independence with the Kanaks. As mentioned above, 27 gendarmes were seized on Ouvea, but hopes of keeping the protest nonviolent were dashed when four of them were killed in the action. The aroused French government announced that it planned to send army troops to Ouvea to free the gendarmes.

According to this version, Yeweine slipped back to Mare when the French threatened to use force and before the operation backfired. (Although Yeweine's presence on Ouvea has not been confirmed, it is certain that the operation was planned and largely carried out under the direction of local UC leaders.) Wea was left to face the French alone.

The French authorities tortured local Kanaks on Ouvea, including Wea's elderly father, in an effort to get information on the whereabouts of the hostages and the intentions of the hostage takers. Wea's father later died from the effects of the torture. On May 5, French troops attacked the cave in which the hostages were held. They freed the hostages but two soldiers and 19 Kanaks were killed. Although he had not participated in the hostage taking, Wea was arrested as a prime suspect and flown to Paris in chains.

On returning to Ouvea, Wea resumed his long-time fanatical campaign for immediate independence and vigorously opposed the Matignon Accord. After the Accord was signed, he publicly attacked Tjibaou and Yeiwene for their support of it and their unwillingness to press forward toward independence. Wea felt that Yeiwene and the UC had betrayed him and those who had died fighting the French on Ouvea.<sup>5</sup>

Visiting the territory in August 1988, after the signing, Prime Minister Rocard invited island leaders to a party, including General Vidal, who had commanded the French troops in the attack on Ouvea. Yeiwene at first accepted the invitation, but when he learned that the general would attend, he decided not to go. But Wea thought that Yeiwene had attended the party, and he was infuriated; he may have decided at that time to take drastic action.

In any case, on learning that Tjibaou and Yeiwene were planning to visit Ouvea in May 1989, the anniversary of the attack, to attend a commemoration ceremony and to try to quiet the island, where barricades still surrounded Wea's village, Wea and his family decided to kill Yeiwene. They felt that Yeiwene had betrayed them after the seizure of the gendarmes and that he had done nothing to help in the negotiations with the French before they attacked the cave. Moreover, Yeiwene had signed and supported the Matignon Accord. All of these actions particularly galled Wea, as Yeiwene was also an islander.

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<sup>5</sup>Wea appears to have had an exaggerated sense of his own importance, and he was particularly annoyed that despite his request and personal grievances and losses he had not been included in the group that went to Paris for the discussions in June 1988. One outside observer of Caledonian affairs noted that Wea was "highly strung, and the Ouvea deaths in early 1988 seemed to have upset his mental balance."

According to this version of the assassination, Tjibaou was included because he had signed Matignon and had led the campaign for its acceptance. However, Yeiwene was the main target.

The plot apparently was limited to Wea's family and close supporters and not directly related to a more general effort to undercut the Accord. Uregei is rumored to have been somehow involved, but no proof of this has been offered. However, in his public statements he has failed to express condolences or to distance himself and his party from the crime, and he is reportedly staying outside the territory because he is afraid that he may be killed if he returns. There are also reports that some Wallisians from Ouvea are afraid to return to Noumea for fear of retaliation against them.

While Tjibaou's death so far has provoked no public disturbances, no one knows what it might lead to in the longer term. One close observer of the scene expects troubles in May or June 1990, when the Kanak year of mourning is over and "payback" could begin.



#### IV. DIFFICULTIES OF IMPLEMENTING THE MATIGNON ACCORD

Many Kanaks looked forward to the new French money that they would receive under the Matignon Accord, believing that it would greatly aid their development. Ironically, some are now seeing it in a somewhat different perspective. First, as noted above, the question of who gets it has added to the discord among Kanaks. Another aspect is perhaps more disturbing: Because the money is coming in such abundance and being given out so quickly, often without adequate planning or preparations, it is seen more as an effort to "buy" the Kanaks than to help them.

Kanaks and others gave examples of the lack of planning of projects and of the inadequate preparation of Kanaks to receive and use money properly. According to one Caldoche, a Kanak who had been given money for two ambulances in a small village treated the vehicles almost as toys, speeding around the village with lights flashing, but to no purpose. One of the two ambulances is allegedly in such a state of disrepair that it hardly runs. A Kanak told me that Belep, with a population of a few hundred, had received nearly \$U.S. 2 million to build a gas station (though there are only half a dozen cars in Belep), a cold storage plant (though the old one had been repaired and was working well), and a shuttle boat (though they had one, which is quite adequate). The two events may not be described completely accurately, but many such stories are going around, and they are believed.

Such stories do not in any way help the situation. Some hard-line Caldoches feel that the French are not only wasting their money, but demonstrating again that the Kanaks are not capable of handling money for either private enterprises or government, and may never be. The Kanaks themselves, also concerned about the level of their present business capabilities, are embarrassed by accounts of their incompetence; most Kanak leaders know that they need time and training to develop business capabilities. The dilemma for both the Kanaks and the French government leaders is that they need to demonstrate immediate progress, yet they need time to prepare and train the Kanaks properly. The French government is in a "damned if you do and damned if you don't" position.

Matignon called for the formation of three provinces with their own largely autonomous governments on July 14, 1989, after a year of preparation during which the high commissioner would administer the whole territory. I wrote after my March visit:

Details on the preparations for establishing the three separate provinces rather eluded me when I left New Caledonia in late March. The capitals for the North and Loyalty Islands provinces had not been announced, nor had the election date for the provincial elections. Other problems were surfacing, and not surprisingly, many officials were reported not anxious to leave the good life of Noumea for the bush. I asked several FLNKS leaders what specific development programs or projects were being planned. They said they did not know; they maintained they could not participate in present planning because they had rejected participation in the four earlier regional governments (Pons plan) which were supposed to be involved in the preplanning. Most of them talked about businesses, tourism, more roads, and ferries to the Loyalty Islands. There were vague plans for a port and an airport in the North province. One said that the French were doing all the planning. This was unfortunate, if true, as the Kanaks should have been involved and need the experience.

It was strange to me that the FLNKS was not insisting on being involved, especially as it hopes to control the North and Loyalty Islands provinces. Members did say that they thought the development money would be available and that high-level officials in Noumea were trying to work out the necessary arrangements, though they were suspicious of lower-level officials' efforts. One leader said he didn't expect much to happen in 1989, as that would be a period of organization for the provinces and the development efforts. He hoped the provincial governments could start to function in early 1990.

Against this, it should be noted that *independantiste* organizers, under Tjibaou's direction, had put considerable efforts into planning and that some of this earlier planning should still be relevant.

The reorganization of the Caledonian system began after the provincial elections in June 1989. Noumea, in addition to remaining the territorial capital, became the capital of the South province; Kone in the north, and We on Lifou island were selected as the capitals of the North and Loyalty Island provinces. This late decision meant that none of the physical infrastructure required for the new provincial governments had been planned, much less constructed. The defense for this lag was that the provinces were to choose their own capitals, and they could not do this until after the June provincial elections.

Although the territorial government made some arrangements for the provinces and began the selection of officials to be assigned to the provincial governments, they seem to have done little specific planning. The French explain that the Kanaks are to do their own detailed planning, but the delay may also have been unavoidable because of the sequence of election and other administrative matters.

Whatever the reasons, the result was that on July 14, 1989, the official inauguration day of the provincial governments, the provincial assemblies had been elected and they had chosen the capitals and the officers to be the executives, but few other concrete steps had been taken. Some Kanaks expected that somehow the governments would emerge full grown and start operating, but such hopes have been disappointed. Others were quite aware that the governments could not possibly start to function until at least well into 1990.

Some of the French officials were rather defensive when I said that it looked like the new governments were mostly on paper. But this is an important point, as much time has been lost; in reality, the Accord will have eight rather than ten years in which to achieve its goals.

The Matignon Accord calls for periodic progress reviews and a formal report in 1992 on its implementation in the territory. At the time of my March 1989 visit, much was made of the formal report. Some said that if substantial progress were not evident, Tjibaou would be in serious trouble.<sup>1</sup> Tjibaou himself knew what the criteria would be for measuring progress, and this lack of definition could only lead to misunderstanding. By July, however, almost no one mentioned the report: Everyone seemed to be involved in getting the process started rather than worrying about 1992. The frequent assessments of the Advisory Committee—composed of the senior officials of the three provinces and the territory—were stressed.

In the first few days of my July visit, it seemed that a catch-22 situation might be developing. Several Caldoche leaders said that they were waiting for specific requests for specific projects from the Kanaks and the provincial governments and that no funds would be given until these were received. A few Kanaks, in contrast, unable to overcome habit so quickly, contended that the French government should start projects and programs. However, further investigation suggested that the Kanaks probably would begin to make specific requests. The president of the North province said that he was going to have plenty of requests for lots of money but was still working on them.

The situation seems to bear out my observation in March that planning was inadequate for the quick launching of the three new provincial governments. French and Caldoches replied that the purpose of this process was to enable the Kanaks to take the initiative and do their own planning. However, almost everyone realizes that there are not enough Kanaks trained for these tasks and that the French officials will have to help considerably during the first few years.

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<sup>1</sup>The point again illustrates the fragility of support for the Accord.

The French, in fact, are involved in the planning and administration, as most of the civil servants in the present territorial government are French, and many will be distributed to the three provincial governments. In addition, some functionaries will be sent directly from France to the provinces. The moves will not be easy, however, as few if any of these officials want to "live in the bush."

The high commissioner has decreed that all administrative services should be in place in the three capitals by January 1, 1990. Except for Noumea, the capital of the South province, this will be quite a challenge, as a visit to Kone, the capital of the North province, revealed. Kone is a small village of a few thousand residents, mostly Caldoches in the town itself and Kanaks in the surrounding area. It has a post office, two motels (one quite good, with an excellent restaurant), a few stores and gas stations, but very limited housing and almost no office space. It was said that the president of the province would reside in the better motel.

Kone is hardly in a position to receive the hundreds of officials scheduled to arrive by January 1990, not to mention those who will support them and those who will develop the city. Plans are under way to build 40 residences, a provincial office, and additional office space, but none of this had actually started as of the end of July. Although I did not visit the Loyalty Islands province, I was told that We, its capital, was even less ready than Kone.

The situation holds several potential dangers: First, some Kanaks, when they see little happening and especially no improvements for themselves, will become impatient and even suspicious of the French government's intentions. There is also the possibility, which is already in the minds of some Kanaks, that the French and Caldoches will indeed have to do most of the work at first, as not enough Kanaks are trained, but that the Caldoches may never leave, thus making Kone into a second Noumea rather than the planned second center, or *pole*, run by Kanaks. At a minimum, the Kanaks will miss out on the initial stages of government and be deprived of valuable experience.

It is doubtful that the Kanaks understand the complexity and scale of activities involved in the decentralization process and in the organization of provincial governments, activities that started officially only on July 14, 1989.<sup>2</sup> In many ways, the preparation of the physical structures is the easiest part of the problem—organizing and staffing the new governments are the really difficult problems. To judge such a process during the first few

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<sup>2</sup>Some Kanaks complained that the infrastructure and personnel should have been in place before July 14, as the provincial governments were supposed to function as of that date.

weeks is obviously unfair, but one cannot help but worry about the high expectations of the Kanaks for the new provincial governments and for their own personal socioeconomic improvement.

## V. YOUTH

I was interested to learn in March that the leaders of both the Caldoche and the Kanak communities are very much concerned about the Kanak youth. The high commissioner and the mayor of Noumea strongly believe that the future of the young people demands immediate and tangible improvements: education, jobs, and better living conditions. The Kanak leaders agree. Clearly, most of the top leadership in New Caledonia believe that these are some of the top priorities for the immediate future, but again, it was difficult to learn of specific plans.

One Kanak political leader was particularly disturbed by what he saw as the increasing radicalization of some of the young people. He urged that the churches and tribes join in the effort to work with the youth and stop this trend towards radicalization. He thought that some of the present efforts were too narrow, focusing only on government jobs, and a broader approach was needed. He mentioned the "barefoot" nurses who have been partially trained as paramedics and have been extremely useful on Mare. He suggested more sports, cultural activities, and even video clubs (with the right films, of course).

Recent Kanak youth activities scattered over the entire territory suggest that these worries and concerns are justified. Increasing acts of petty violence, roughing up people, and arson indicate that the youth are restless and prone to violence. For example, the Kaala-Gomen youth were blamed for burning all of the municipality's buses on the night of March 22, 1989; in July, a dentist and his helpers were assaulted on Ouvea. The situation is tense on the island, and the youth are particularly restless in Canala, Yate, and Ponerihouen. Unemployed, undereducated, poor, and restless, and with a tendency to drink too much alcohol, young Kanaks constitute a potentially explosive group.<sup>1</sup> These problems, of course, are not unique to New Caledonia.

One Kanak told me that many youth had lost faith in their political, religious, and tribal custom leaders, thus depriving their lives of purpose and direction. Political leaders are seen as having sold out to the French and given up on independence, while the religious and tribal custom leaders do not seem relevant to the modern world. Many of the elders in the villages

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<sup>1</sup>In July, youths on Ouvea were reported to be using cannabis. After the attack on the dentist, the high commissioner banned the use of alcohol on the island. When I inquired under what authority the high commissioner did so, I was told that it didn't matter, as the territory had to be quiet when Le Pensec arrived later in July.

are confused by the youths' behavior and ignorant of changing times. Some have even stopped trying to control them. In the rural areas, the youth are revolting against elders and customs; in Noumea, against all authority. The youth are a social problem, but politics is not far below the surface.

The difference between the age groups is becoming more pronounced. Senior Kanak political leaders seem to be learning that much work and patience are required to change age-old political and socioeconomic systems into very different modern ones. They have noted the severe problems of Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Vanuatu, and some from these island states have apparently advised the Kanak leaders to go slowly and prepare carefully.

Some Caldoches report that a few older Kanaks are beginning to wonder whether the ten years of the Matignon plan will be enough to prepare them for independence and a modern economy. Even Father Lini, the prime minister of Vanuatu, who initially criticized the Matignon Accord, now conditionally supports it, speaking out publicly at the South Pacific Forum meeting in Kiribati in July 1989. The maturing attitude of many of the current Kanak leaders contrasts starkly with that of the youth, who are impatient for progress, personal improvement, and especially independence, which they still see as the panacea for all their problems.

The high commissioner has established a broadly based Youth Committee to address the problems and make recommendations. The government also is paying many youths a monthly wage for up to six months. It is not clear what this is intended to accomplish, and it could be another example of inadequate planning. Whatever the purpose, it contributes to the growing Kanak belief that the French are just trying to buy them. While Noumea has its problems with youth, such problems are certainly not limited to the city; youth are a territory-wide problem. The governments, one hopes, will soon develop meaningful programs for the youth.

## VI. CUSTOMS, POWER, AND NATIONAL GOALS

Both Kanak and European leaders are concerned that the Kanaks' traditional way of life seriously hinders their progress into the modern world. Two closely related aspects—land and customs—are particularly troublesome, and they are at the core of Kanak life.

### LAND

As in all Melanesian countries, land is important for food and shelter but even more so for its spiritual and emotional values. It is deeply associated with the ancestors and spirits of the clan or family that collectively possess it.

The land is verbally passed on to successive generations by the elders. Even before the French arrived, there were continuous disputes and fighting over land, as this method of transmission easily leads to differences of opinions between families. Because land is essentially received from ancestors, held and used in trust, and passed on to future generations, it is difficult to alienate it. It can be legitimately transferred through marriages and other such agreements, but less often through sale or conquest.<sup>1</sup>

Kanaks prefer to live on land inhabited by their ancestors and their spirits, and so moving is a major problem for them. Moving them against their will is even more serious. Furthermore, they hold much of the land sacred and believe that it should not be despoiled by mining and other modern uses. For example, a sawmill was recently closed near Bourail when the clans involved decided that they did not want trees cut down on their land.

This land system obviously poses problems for a modern economy. A few see the Fijian land system as a possible solution: There, native Fijians own most of the land but lease it under long-term agreements to Indians and others who can use it; the government runs the system.

### FAMILY

The second major impediment to progress involves the equal sharing among members of a family or clan. Kanak custom calls for extended families to work together and share all their earnings and assets. When young Kanaks leave the village to get jobs in Noumea or other towns, they are expected to send their earnings back to the family, and

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<sup>1</sup>It is still polite and advisable to ask permission of the local chief before entering a clan's land. I was involved in the process just a few miles outside Noumea.



considerable pressures are put on them to do this. They are also called on, just as if they were still in the village, to contribute to various ceremonies of the clan.

Clan members also feel that each member's home and business are equally theirs, no matter where they may be living. Family members will freely help themselves to merchandise in another member's store without paying, or may come to live for long periods with one who has left the village. Such practices make it almost impossible for Kanaks to have retail businesses or run restaurants.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these pressures, Kanaks are leaving the village in search of a better life. Some try to conceal their whereabouts and their possessions so as to protect themselves from this system. These customs are disappearing slowly. However, many Kanaks do not want to break completely with custom. Some will reside in the city and then go back to the clan. There are even reports that Kanaks who have studied and lived in France for years return permanently to their village.

Furthermore, members of a clan who break with custom may face serious consequences. According to one account, a Kanak left his village to become a successful merchant in nearby Kone. He later moved his wife to Kone and seemed to have broken with his clan. Not long after his wife arrived, members of his clan poisoned her and then him.

In another case, a young islander went to the main island and developed into an excellent chef in Kone, earning quite a good salary. He sent most of this back to his clan, though his employer quietly put some aside for him. After about a year's absence, he was called back to his clan on Mare for a prearranged marriage. He likes the young woman, and wants to take her back to Kone. The clan, however, wants them to remain on Mare. The young man has adapted quite well to modern life and does not want to return to his clan, but he feels strongly that if he resists, the clan will put a spell on him. These are not isolated happenings but occur more and more as the struggle between the old and new progresses.

Loyalty Islanders seem to have come under greater Polynesian influence than did the inhabitants of the main island; as a result, the former have powerful chiefs and a set hierarchy. However, they are less strictly tied than are the main islanders to the custom of sharing among family or clan members: Individual Loyalty Islanders can acquire more property and advance further than their kin (though this modern custom is often grudgingly accepted). Consequently, they can more easily adapt to modern society, and many have done well in Noumea.

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<sup>2</sup>One Caldoche told me that he wanted to set up a shop in Hienghene for a young and energetic Kanak woman, but she refused, saying that her family would take everything.

Loyalty Islanders are, however, somewhat isolated on their islands, have had little contact with Europeans, except English missionaries, and cling to their customs. But because the English missionaries kept out all European settlers, the Kanaks own most of the land there. For this reason, the socioeconomic development of the Loyalty Islands has not kept pace with that of the main island. These paradoxes explain, at least in part, why many Loyalty Islanders have moved to Noumea.

Many Kanaks and Caldoches realize that customs must adjust and adapt if Kanaks are to make progress. There is no agreement on modifying customs or on how much they should be changed. Many see customs as an evolving and living culture which, given time, could and would adapt to the modern political and economic world. Others feel that customs cannot or will not change enough.

Some Kanaks believe that television is already a powerful instrument for change, particularly among the young. Radio also informs remote villagers of the outside world, and younger villagers going to the larger towns and Noumea bring back new ideas. Finally, young men doing their national service are exposed to the modern way of life.

The problem involves more than changing people's customs, however; the seldom-discussed struggle for power between the older rural leaders and the younger ones also intensifies the struggle for change. Change is coming, but it will be too fast for some and too slow for others. The young are likely to see it as too slow and may feel that they must take action to hasten it.

## **POLITICAL POWER**

In addition to somehow adapting Kanak custom to the modern world, Kanak leaders are beginning to realize that they must actively court the other ethnic groups in the territory if they hope to win the 1998 referendum for independence. Up to now, most of these groups have supported the RPCR because they believe that they will have a more efficient government, a better run economy, and a more peaceful society if the Caldoches are in charge. Many have a low opinion of Kanak capabilities for both government and private enterprise, and they fear for their prospects if Kanaks achieve independence. Exceptions to this broad generalization are the thousand or so Ni-Vanuatu and some Vietnamese who have favored the Kanak position.

The Kanaks seem to be considering a twofold approach to this problem. The first and most fundamental effort they must make in any case is to prove that they can learn, train for government and business, and rule the island competently. In all probability, a focused

public relations effort would be needed to spread the message of Kanak achievements and to emphasize the benefits of this development to the various groups. But this is in itself not enough.

The Kanaks must also appeal to the other ethnic groups by offering and supporting a broader society which takes into account the interests of these different groups and does not consider only Kanak interests. For people seeking to maintain, even strengthen, their own identity and to gain their own independence, this will call for an unusually high level of statesmanship and understanding. But it must be attempted so as to ensure a more harmonious and prosperous territory, as well as to win the referendum in 1998.

Neither can the Kanaks forget that between 20 and 30 percent of their own people have consistently voted for and supported the RPCR. The RPCR and, to an extent, the French government, through the distribution of funds and favors, will certainly try to hold their support and in addition gain new adherents. Already, as noted above, many Kanaks are benefiting from the Matignon programs and see the benefits of being part of France; indeed, this is the heart of French government strategy. The Kanaks, therefore, must also clearly demonstrate to their own people that they can govern and run an efficient economy, and in addition, achieve that still-cherished and magical goal: independence.

## **NATIONAL GOALS**

Neither side has give up its basic goals: for the FLNKS, independence; for the RPCR, remaining a part of France. Meanwhile, the French government wants to see major changes in New Caledonia—changes that will lay the basis for an equitable settlement, preferably not independence. However, as both sides contemplate the future, neither likes the idea of losing and neither seems to relish renewed violence if Matignon fails. Leaders on both sides told me that they would not accept defeat. When I queried one Kanak leader about what he would do if it seemed clear in 1996 or 1997 that the FLNKS were going to lose the referendum, he replied, "We will no longer play the game and will take to the bush." The conservative right on the Caldoche side holds essentially the same view.

It would not take many extremists from either side to plunge the territory into violence or even civil war. How to convince all the people to accept the majority's will is an increasingly serious problem that the leaders must soon address. While threat of renewed violence is probably the most compelling argument for the majorities of both sides, it is not for the extremists. Other means of persuasion, or alternative solutions to Matignon, must be sought.

Indeed, there was more talk in July of other solutions. One sometimes mentioned was the Cook Islands model. In this case, New Zealand sees to the islands' defense and foreign policy and provides financial support, but in other respects the islands govern themselves. Some thought that the Matignon approach, with its three largely autonomous provinces, approached this model, or could be adjusted to it, and that the referendum could be eliminated. If so, the three-province arrangement would continue indefinitely.

Another solution, advanced mostly by the Caldoches, involves dividing territory into two independent parts; the South would remain part of France and the other two provinces would become an independent Kanak state. A few believed that the North also would be taken over by the Caldoches and remain a part of France.<sup>3</sup> This thinking is not widespread, but it is significant that a few leaders on both sides, worried about the feasibility of the yes-or-no democratic approach and fearful of renewed violence, are thinking of alternative solutions.

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<sup>3</sup>One Caldoche remarked, not entirely facetiously, that he thought the positions of the Caldoches and Kanaks on independence might be reversed by 1998, as the Kanaks would definitely want to remain a part of France so that it could protect them from the rapacious Caldoches.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

I have some doubts that the Matignon Accord will be pursued to its final conclusion, the referendum in 1998.<sup>1</sup> The Accord calls for a yes-or-no solution to a complex, confrontational issue and tends to encourage polarization of positions rather than compromise and accommodation. Neither side has changed its position, and many on both sides would not accept electoral defeat in 1998. In what might be, and in some ways is, a honeymoon period, serious old problems continue to exist and new issues have arisen which are not encouraging.

Both sides perhaps have underestimated the complexity of decentralization and the creation of three new provincial governments; this miscalculation could easily lead to serious frustrations. The allocation of the new money and of training positions has created some unforeseen difficulties, including charges of favoritism and misuse of funds. The Kanaks increasingly feel that they are being "bought," and continued frustration over their limited capabilities in a modern business world does not bode well.

The delicate balance between the need for quick results and for laying a proper foundation poses continuing and serious problems. Cynicism and distrust exist on both sides. The Accord was very reluctantly accepted, and it was only because of Tjibaou's leadership that it was finally approved. But Tjibaou is gone and no one has replaced him.

On the other hand, many leaders on both sides have positive feelings. Kanaks are being trained, and the French government is making money available to Kanaks. The provincial governments are acquiring personnel and formulating plans and programs. Many of the leaders are realizing the complexity of the problems of independence and modernization. Many French officials and some Caldoches are trying to help the Kanaks. They are recognizing the complexities of the situation and have a better feel for the time needed for basic changes. Obvious progress in self-government and in the socioeconomic sphere in the next few years will improve the chances of the Accord's success.

However, the question remains of whether socioeconomic progress and some self-government will prove viable substitutes for independence. In some respects, independence can be seen as the greatest cargo cult ever to arise in the South Pacific: A young, educated Melanesian said, "Yes, independence is magic, and Kanaks are dreamers." Many who seek

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<sup>1</sup>Recent history indicates that independence movements are usually quite impatient. Many Kanaks exhibit this tendency.

independence seem really to believe that it will solve all of their problems and fulfill all of their needs.<sup>2</sup> What seems to me to offer the most hope is the fact that a few on both sides are beginning to consider a peaceful solution to the emotional impasse that Matignon addressed but may not resolve. The Accord would not have been in vain, however, as it brought peace, progress, time, and opportunity for a democratic solution.

Perhaps even more important in the long run is the fact that Matignon also may have bought time for leaders to work out other solutions should a referendum prove not to be the way to a solution. Some may argue that such talk only weakens the Accord, and official support for such views might do this. No alternatives to the referendum were included in the Accord; however, a peaceful solution to this complex confrontational situation would certainly be in the spirit of the Accord.<sup>3</sup>

The current French socialist government's policies and style have brought about the present more peaceful and stable situation in the territory as well as improved French relations with Australia and France's standing in the region. How much a change of government in Paris would affect these positive developments is not clear.

The national referendum on the Matignon Accord in November 1988 gave some permanence to developments in New Caledonia; however, a new government's attitude toward the Accord and its implementation could essentially undo it. On the other hand, a new government might be willing to let the Accord run its course in the hope that the 1998 referendum would result in keeping the territory a part of France. While developments in the territory are critical, political changes in France could have significant repercussions, though they are as difficult to predict as developments in the territory.

In the present highly emotional atmosphere of New Caledonia, one cannot rule out the unpredictable. A small incident could ignite the fire again, and there are a few who would want it—probably on both sides. One may hope that as the political and economic developments grow stronger, the territory will be able to handle unforeseen events and continue its peaceful progress.

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<sup>2</sup>This is still true despite some tarnishing of the independence idea because of difficulties in some recently independent countries in the region.

<sup>3</sup>Prime Minister Rocard, during his August visit to the territory, said that the Matignon Accord was on track, while admitting some problems and difficulties. He also seemed to endorse the notion of a "peaceful solution" as the real goal of a Matignon Accord in New Caledonia.

# **LIST OF INFORMANTS<sup>1</sup>**

Patrick and Leo Ardiami, ranchers in North Province

Marie-Clair Bicallossi, delegate for responsibility for women's rights in New Caledonia

Jacques S. Boengkih, Kanak Association for Economic and Cultural Development,  
Sydney, Australia

Joel Bonnemaïson,\* ORSTROM/ASEPAC

Raymond Bouvard, president, Chambre de Metiers

Helen Brinon, wife of civil servant and conservationist

Francois Burck, president, Union Caledonienne

Arnold Daly, president, Chamber of Commerce

Michel Doppler, directeur, Office Territorial du Tourisme

Maurice Droin, Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie

Bernard Grasset,\* French high commissioner of New Caledonia

Justin Guillemard, conservative member, Territorial Parliament

Leopold Joredie,\* secretary general of the Union Caledonienne, president, North Province

Manuel Kasareou,\* director, Museum of Noumea

Jacques Lafleur, president, Rassemblement pour la Caledonie dans la Republique, and  
president, South Province

Jacques LaPlagne, professeur d'Anglais (retired)

Emery Lavallee, American veteran living in New Caledonia

Jacques Leques,\* mayor of Noumea

Didier Leroux,\* president-directeur general, Federation de la Patronale

Franck Madoeuf,\* teacher and journalist

Pierre Maresca, former secretary general, Rassemblement pour la Caledonie dans la Republique

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<sup>1</sup>Those with whom I spoke more than once are indicated by an asterisk following the name.

Henri Mariotti, mayor of Farino

Nidoish Naisseline, head, Liberation Kanake Socialiste

Edmond Nekiriai, mayor of Poya and leader, Union Progressiste Melanesienne

David O'Leary,\* consul general of Australia

Colonel Peters, chief of staff, French Forces in New Caledonia

Francis Poadouy, former mayor of Poindimie

Phillida Stephen.,\* interpreter and proprietor, The English Bookshop

Jean-Jacques and Jane Tiburzio, teacher in North Province

Jean-Marie Tjibaou, president, Front de Liberation Nationale Kanake Socialiste (deceased)

Sarah Walls, *Sydney Morning Herald*

Rock Wamytan, delegate, South Province Assembly, and foreign affairs representative, Front de Liberation Nationale Kanake Socialiste

Yeweine Yeweine, vice president, Front de Liberation Nationale Kanake Socialiste (deceased)